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## ATG Interviews Gary Rautenstrauch and Philip Blackwell

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# ATG Interviews Gary Rautenstrauch and Philip Blackwell

## Blackwell's Book Services

by **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

**ATG:** *Blackwell's Book Services has always stressed loyalty and customer service as a priority. But, your online system over the past year, long touted as a big improvement, has not been received favorably in the library community. In fact, it has been unfavorably received. How did this happen and why?*

**GR:** Not surprisingly, there are no off-the-shelf software systems that deliver the very specialized library services provided by **Blackwell's**. The requirements are so unique, that our systems are basically one-of-a-kind and rather complex. That complexity carries risk, especially at implementation when converting from a legacy system. Our implementation failed. Customers received poor service and the **Blackwell's** employees were devastated by this event. Due to the complexity, it took a long time to recover. But operations are coming back on track and service is getting better every day. We are energized to continue improving and eager to earn the loyalty and customer service reputation back that you mentioned.

**ATG:** *What are your plans to improve the order and delivery systems that you have spent so much money to put into place?*

**GR:** At the tactical level, we are establishing measurements, corrective action processes and system enhancements to make sure we continue to improve service, every day. Strategically, we just kicked off a process to guide us for the next few years. Research has begun to help us analyze what's happening with libraries, content, technology, other providers and the general environment in which we all operate. From this information we will build plans

around initiatives we think can provide the most value to academic libraries.

**ATG:** *Philip, what's the company line on this? Do you agree with Gary's assessment?*

**PB:** I absolutely agree with **Gary**. But I would like to emphasize a couple of points. Our service standards may be back to pre-go-live levels today, but that is not good enough. We invested our time, money, blood, sweat and a tear to deliver a service that sets new standards in the industry and recognizes the changing dynamics of the market. We have to be faster, smarter and more flexible than ever to meet the evolving needs of the library community and their patrons. Right after implementation we let ourselves and our customers down and that hurt. I would like to apologize for this, but also pay tribute to the Herculean efforts of many people in the business that worked tirelessly to turn things around. We would not be here without them.

**ATG:** *And, Gary, you have had many great positions, but you haven't stayed in them more than a year or two? Why? And are you that much of a wizard that you can restore a company to normalcy in such a short period of time? How? What's your magic formula?*

**GR:** I actually worked for my last company for over twenty years. Staying power much like **Blackwell's** 125 years of commitment to education, knowledge and academic libraries makes a difference. There's no magic formula, but success factors usually include a great team, hard work and customer focus.

**ATG:** *Blackwell's has recently brought in Mark Maloney, formerly of Borders, to oversee the Blackwood NJ distribution center. Why? What kind of efficiencies/changes/improvements do you expect to see as a result of this? Does Mark have a goals and objectives statement in his contract?*

**GR:** **Mark** brings years of experience in the book business, and even some previous library distribution service. As a professional distribution manager, one of his strengths is facilitating teams of employees to solve problems and meet requirements. His goals and objectives are the same as everyone else's here, to make **Blackwell's** the best supplier to academic libraries.

**ATG:** *Gary, how do you get along with Philip Blackwell? And, Philip, how do you get along with Gary? How long have you both known each other?*

**GR:** I've known **Philip** for several years and we get along great, even though he is British. There are times however, when I feel his use of the English language is slightly off, like when we try to talk about football.

**PB:** **Gary** is a great bookman. His past achievements as a leader and dare I say it a creator of shareholder value speak for themselves and we are lucky to have him. The transition has been remarkably smooth, we speak the same language on business and I and the whole **Blackwell** team have a lot to learn from him. We are having to teach him that true football is played with a round ball though!

**ATG:** *Gary, since you will have a direct report to Philip Blackwell, will there be more collaboration with Blackwell's UK businesses? In what ways? What is happening to Blackwell's UK businesses?*

**GR:** I just returned from Oxford. There is a dedicated, talented **Blackwell's** group there and my impression is that collaboration between the business units is good. Although organizations often partner with others to deliver solutions to patrons or customers; it's special to partner with groups with whom you share a common heritage and passion, as the **Blackwell** units do.

**ATG:** *Philip, can you comment as well? What is happening to the bookstore business, for example? Is Gary involved in that at all?*

**PB:** **Gary's** focus is on serving academic libraries through **Blackwell's Book Services**, which covers all our library services businesses. It includes a UK-based business unit which although mainly focused on exporting from the UK works closely with our bookstores to serve UK academic libraries. As we speak the undergraduate year is starting in Britain. **Blackwell** stores have a new look, and a sharp focus on incoming students by offering learning aids, special academic purchase plans and expanded inventory.

**ATG:** *Is Blackwell's Collection Manager the backbone of your service to libraries? Are the collaborative collection development features making an impact on how academic libraries, particularly those in active consortia, determine need and approve purchase? Will both of you please elaborate?*

**GR:** **Collection Manager** is the gateway to many of our services. Facilitating collaborative collection development is one of its unique and powerful features, used by groups such as consortia. As you know, such collaboration between libraries is not practical in every situation.


**PB:** We developed collaborative collection development in response to customer demand and it is still a new service that customers are learning to use. Like many new tools it is technically available to use today but the cultural and organizational changes necessary across groups of libraries to get the best out of it will take longer to evolve.

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on earth? Insert a few names and see if it does not take you breath away for one reason or another.

The point of this exercise was not to limn a paean to the U.S. (though someone should at least once a year) but to attempt to refocus our attention on giving thanks, and what we all have to be thankful for. Begin here, where you live. I've mentioned a few things that all of us take for granted from time to time that, upon further reflection, we may now wish to pause and utter a word or two of thanks.

To put all this in Churchillian terms, this purple-mountain majesty, this free-soaring eagle, this amber-grained nation, this America is the worst nation on earth — except for all the rest. 



**ATG:** *What can we expect in the future for CM? For Blackwell's Book Services?*

**GR:** We will continue to enhance **Collection Manager** to make it a valuable tool that supports many aspects of a library's workflow such as selection, ordering and interfaces with other systems. We are currently researching the next level of support academic libraries need from **Collection Manager**. You can expect **Blackwell's Book Services** to innovate and continue to create intelligent solutions for building and managing library collections.

**ATG:** *What are Gary Rautenstrauch's greatest strengths?*

**GR:** Probably my insight into many of the products, services and technology used by libraries today, as well as some basic management skills to develop strategy, execute and help colleagues and customers to be successful.

**ATG:** *Philip what are Gary's greatest strengths? Why did you hire him?*

**PB:** Gary is the most important hire we have made in the last six years and as you can imagine the due diligence process was lengthy. We asked Gary to join **Blackwell** on the strength of his excellent track record in a number of fields in distribution and his

experience in dealing with a number of issues the business faces. His insight will give us a better competitive edge in this market. But above all his abilities as an outstanding team leader capable of leading the business in its next stage of development.

**ATG:** *What will Dan Halloran really be doing? Dan has been the face of Blackwell's for nearly twenty years. Are you making him the scapegoat at this point in time?*

**GR:** I know **Dan** agrees with me that there is no one single face of **Blackwell's**. Rather, there are hundreds of dedicated team members, all striving to deliver the best value we can to our academic library customers. Joining such a great group is one of the key reasons I came here. **Dan** continues to work with our customers and provide guidance to many of us at **Blackwell's**.

**ATG:** *Philip, comments?*

**PB:** Gary's appointment strengthens the management team and his skill set is complementary to **Dan's**. And although with the pace of change it may seem like twenty years we have only been working with **Dan** for six years — last time I counted.

**ATG:** *Gary, seeing that you oversaw the acquisition of Yankee and PMS by B&T in '98 and '99, and were involved in the acquisition of B&T by the Carlyle Group, we are curious. Is the next step a sale of Blackwell's?*


**GR:** My time at **B&T** started about ten years before the **Carlyle Group** acquisition. **B&T** acquired **Yankee** and **PMSC** in those days to expand its offerings to public and academic libraries. Acquisitions by financial sponsors are often done for different reasons. A company sale is not the next step here.

**ATG:** *Tell us what you do for fun, Gary? Do you ever have any or are you always rescuing companies?*

**GR:** I enjoy running (I ran a marathon last year), camping and an occasional round of golf. And, I often enjoy working. Based on my first thirty days here, I think I will really enjoy **Blackwell's**.

**ATG:** *How about you, Philip?*

**PB:** We will continue to serve our academic customers for as long as they value what we have to offer and want to buy from us. Every year we have to work harder and faster to remain relevant in this digital age, but we are not unique in that respect. It is the many dimensions of this challenge that get me up in the morning and keep me awake at night. I have a young family that fill in the gaps and luckily we enjoy many of the same activities — skiing, sailing and books of course.

**ATG:** *Thanks so much for your comments and cooperation!* 

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## ATG Interviews Alice and Klaus Peters

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### Publishers, A K Peters

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by Richard Abel <kstrauch@comcast.net>

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**ATG:** *What is the subject and intellectual level of the current AKP list?*

**AKP:** Reflecting the background and interests of its principals, **Alice** and **Klaus Peters**, **A K Peters** focuses on books and journals in the mathematical sciences and computer science. Most of our books are directed at professional readers who are involved with research and development, stressing cutting edge material in computer graphics, with applications in animation, computer games, and virtual reality, and research monographs in pure and applied mathematics. We also believe that the mathematical sciences form an integral part of our culture, not only because mathematics is at the root of many scientific and technological advances, but also because it's universal manifestation of human nature and its connection to the arts and philosophy. For that reason we try to advance the awareness and education of the intellectual public in things mathematical. Our strong list of biographical works, for example *The Honors Class: Hilbert's Problems and their Solvers* and the autobiography of the influential mathematician *Saunders Mac Lane: a Mathematical Autobiography* and books on advanced mathematical puzzles and origami will help to further that awareness.

**ATG:** *What is the present organization of the firm?*

**AKP:** **A K Peters** is a privately held corporation which is directed by the two publishers **Alice Peters** and **Klaus Peters**. In order to optimize our services we handle all aspects of editing, production, and customer service in-house using some freelance services for copyediting and design. Our order fulfillment is handled by a large warehouse and shipping facility and is connected to our electronic ordering system.

**ATG:** *How did you and Alice come to form the firm?*

**AKP:** Both **Alice** and I came to publishing from the academic environment, teaching at universities in the US and Germany, respectively. Starting **A K Peters** is literally a direct result of the merger and acquisition trend in publishing. After twice experiencing a takeover of the company where we worked in responsible and rather independent editorial positions we decided to start our own company where we could pursue our idea of publishing in the service of the academic community without restrictions other than economic restraints.

**ATG:** *What was Alice's previous back-*

*ground in mathematics publishing? What was yours?*

**AKP:** Actually our background is very similar, except for a phase transition. I was invited by **Springer Verlag** in Germany in the year 1964 to become their first in-house mathematics editor. Incidentally this was the year when **Springer** established a foothold in New York by starting its North American operation. In 1972, **Alice** was hired in New York as the mathematics editor. Later that year she moved to Germany to take responsibility for the mathematics program when I became the director of **Springer**. I should mention that **Springer Verlag** was run in an extraordinary collegial way in those days which allowed the second mathematics editor in Heidelberg, **Walter Kaufmann-Buehler**, to move to New York and assume **Alice's** position there. **Alice** and I have continued our cooperation through the founding of **Birkhäuser Boston** and at **Academic Press** until we started at **A K Peters** in 1992.

**ATG:** *I understand that you have recently completed a very successful private investment placement. What are your publishing and editorial plans for use of this new capital?*

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